

A globally competitive bio-energy and bio-products cluster in Central and Eastern Montana...

The WIRED region of Central and Eastern Montana, which encompasses 32 counties and six Indian reservations, is roughly equal in size to the states of Pennsylvania and New York. Agriculture is a major economic force. However, this is primarily commodity based agriculture with value-adding steps taking place outside Montana.

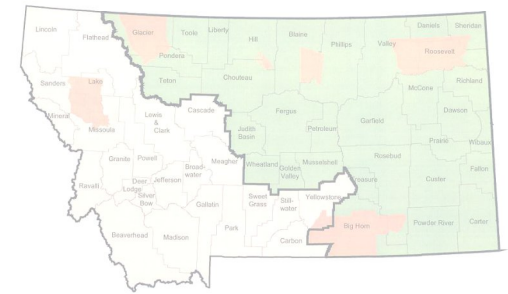
Socio-economic trends of the region include an aging and declining population, wages and salaries that are depressed, high rates of poverty, and increased reliance on farm subsidies. Included in WIRED-Montana are eight of the 10 poorest counties in America as measured by average wage and salaries. Recent years of drought have compounded these problems. When looking for employment, many young, talented folks seek opportunity elsewhere.

However, the WIRED region of Central and Eastern Montana is also rich. The strength of rural Montana is the people – the diligent homesteader - and their love for the region. And, as stated by Governor Schweitzer, “they are also sitting on some of the greatest energy reserves in the nation, be it the wind blowing across the prairies, the crops growing from the ground, or the coal underneath.”

The goal of the WIRED effort, Montana’s Agro-Energy Plan, is to act as a catalyst to transform the rural Ag-economy. Through committed partnerships with Montana’s citizens, state agencies, private businesses, investors, academic institutions, entrepreneurs, philanthropists, and Tribal leaders we aim to create a globally competitive bio-energy and bio-products cluster.

The Vision:

Central and Eastern Montana will have a stable population base with increasing prosperity



The Goals:

- Develop a world-class bio-products industry
- Develop a highly trained and stable/growing workforce to support bio-products and other value-added agricultural products
- Create an agile, integrated talent development system that will prepare state residents to act quickly to take advantage of new economic opportunities and is responsive to business needs
- Create an inclusive and sustainable regional identity and leadership structure that will promote innovation and ensure the long-term success of the transformational initiative

The Transformation Challenge:

From an agricultural commodity driven economy to a value-added economy

The Strategic Objectives:

- Develop sustainable industry in rural Central and Eastern Montana
- Create high-paying jobs in management, marketing, engineering, manufacturing, and construction
- Increase the net return and stability of farm income

Cooperation, Coordination, WIRED Legacy:

Montana’s Agro-Energy Plan (MAP) is a catalyst, coordinating the people, assets, and resources of Central and Eastern Montana as well as helping to bring these assets to bear on emerging markets, technology, and opportunity. The opportunities presented in value-added agriculture and the new frontier of domestic, clean, renewable, energy, in all its forms, offer incredible avenues to bring economic security and prosperity to WIRED Montana.

The WIRED initiative is of limited duration. Much of the progress will just be underway at the scheduled end of the program. Montana’s Agro-Energy Plan however, will continue. MAP is a cross agency program of cooperation and coordination connecting ideas, people, and opportunity. This network will be the legacy of WIRED.